

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method of allowing a user to browse the Web without reducing access and without privacy concerns, comprising:

enabling the user to create a personal profile;

accepting a cookie from Web sites that send cookies;

determining if a site has executed a contract regarding privacy;

making available an electronically-created file to the site, the file containing or enabling the site to access profile information about the user if the site has executed the contract;

removing or hiding the cookie if the site has not executed the contract; and

forwarding an electronically-created file to the site offering the site an opportunity to affirm the contract if the site has not executed the contract.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said enabling the user to create a profile includes providing Web-based forms or providing software that queries the user.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said making available is accomplished by forwarding the electronically-created file to the site.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein said making available is accomplished by placing the electronically-created file on a hard drive of the user.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

creating pseudo-cookies for sites that do not send cookies;

keeping track of the cookies and the pseudo-cookies; and causing a list of the cookies and the pseudo-cookies to be displayed at the request of a user.

6. A method of acting as an intermediary between a user and a Web site, comprising:

 providing a contract addressing the privacy of the user to the Web site;

 causing the contract to be executed by the Web site.

7. The method of claim 6 further comprising:

 providing data entry means to the user so that the user can provide a personal profile; and

 providing the personal profile to the Web site if it has executed the contract.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein said providing the personal profile includes providing an electronically-created file to the Web site.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said providing an electronically-created file includes providing a unique user identifier code to the Web site, which the Web site can use to obtain the personal profile.

10. The method of claim 7 wherein said providing the personal profile to a Web site includes:

receiving a request from the Web site for personal profile data meeting certain requirements; and

providing information to the Web site based on a conglomeration of data from multiple profiles responsive to the request.

11. The method of claim 7 wherein said providing the personal profile to a Web site includes providing a limited amount of data based on user-defined criteria.

12. The method of claim 6 wherein said causing the contract to be executed includes sending a message to the Web site if it has not previously executed the contract.

13. The method of claim 6 wherein said causing the contract to be executed includes:

removing or hiding a cookie sent by the Web site if it has not previously executed the contract; and

sending a message to the Web site informing it that the cookie will not be available until it executes the contract.

14. The method of claim 6 wherein said causing the contract to be executed includes negotiating with the Web site at the outset of the application of the method.

15. A computerized method of insuring the privacy of a user and obtaining personal information about the user, comprising:
executing a contract addressing the privacy of the user;
receiving personal information about the user in exchange for executing the contract.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein said receiving personal information includes:

 sending a cookie to the user; and
 receiving the personal information or a code to obtain the personal information.

17. The method of claim 15 wherein said receiving personal information includes:

 sending a cookie to the user; and
 retrieving the personal information or a code to obtain the personal information from a hard drive of the user.

18. The method of claim 15 wherein said receiving personal information includes:

 requesting information based on certain demographic and other criteria of users; and
 receiving data about the users.

19. A system for protecting the privacy of a user, comprising:

software including:

means to accept a cookie if a site sends a cookie;

means to determine if a site has executed a contract regarding privacy;

means to make available an electronically-created file to sites having executed the contract which contains or enables the site to access profile information about the user;

means to remove or hide the cookie if the site has not executed the contract; and

means to forward an electronically-created file to the site if the site has not executed the contract which contains a message informing the site of the disposition of its cookie and offers the site a chance to execute the contract;

data-entry means which allows the user to enter personal data; and

a user profile database for storing the data.

20. The system of claim 19 wherein said means to make available is means to forward the electronically-created file to the site.

21. The system of claim 19 wherein said means to make available is means to place the electronically-created file on a hard drive of the user.

22. The system of claim 19 further comprising:

means for creating a pseudo-cookie if a site does not send a cookie;

means for keeping track of the cookies and the pseudo-cookies; and

means for causing a list of the cookies and the pseudo-cookies to be displayed at the request of a user.

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23. A computer software product having a computer-executable set of instructions for protecting the privacy of a user, comprising:

means to accept a cookie if a site sends a cookie;

means to determine if a site has executed a contract regarding privacy;

means to make available an electronically-created file to sites having executed the contract which contains or enables the site to access profile information about the user;

means to remove or hide the cookie if the site has not executed the contract; and

means to forward an electronically-created file to the site if the site has not executed the contract which contains a message informing the site of the disposition of its cookie, offers the site a chance to execute the contract.

24. The product of claim 23 further including means for allowing a user to input personal data.

25. The product of claim 24 further including means for a vendor to make queries as to user input.

26. The product of claim 24 wherein said means for allowing a user to input is located on one of a personal computer of the user and a centralized site.

27. The product of claim 23 wherein said means to accept a cookie is located on one of a personal computer of the user and a centralized site.

28. The product of claim 23 further including means for allowing a vendor to input information about the vendor or its products.

29. The product of claim 28 further including means for a user to make queries as to vendor input.

30. The product of claim 28 wherein said means for allowing a vendor to input is located on one of the site of the vendor and a centralized site.

31. The product of claim 23 wherein said means to make available is means to forward the electronically-created file to the site.

32. The product of claim 23 wherein said means to make available is means to place the electronically-created file on a hard drive of the user.

33. The product of claim 23 further comprising:

means for creating a pseudo-cookie if a site does not send a cookie;

means for keeping track of the cookies and the pseudo-cookies; and

means for causing a list of the cookies and the pseudo-cookies to be displayed at the request of a user.